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# The Iris Murdoch Newsletter

## of Japan



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### The Mark(s) of Iris Murdoch

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*She did not dissent when Philippa said she had an entry in  
an imaginary diary reading: 'Mem.: to make my mark.'*

Peter Conradi<sup>1</sup>

Iris Murdoch meant to make her mark on the world. Murdoch scholarship traces the marks she succeeded in leaving as her intellectual legacy. The dynamic of tracing these marks follows two trajectories: inwards and outwards. One spirals inwards to the formative influences on Murdoch's work through study of the marks left in the myriad letters she wrote and the marginalia annotating her books. The other spirals outwards to plot the imprint Murdoch left through the traces of her presence in the writings of others.

The Iris Murdoch Special Collections in the Archives of Kingston University are a rich resource for original research; new acquisitions inspire work by scholars from around the world<sup>2</sup>. Letters to Raymond Queneau, Hal Lidderdale, John Gheeraert and Harry Weinberger have recently been acquired<sup>3</sup>, and Anne Rowe and Avril Horner are currently editing *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1942 - 1995*<sup>4</sup>.

Evidence that critical work on Murdoch is burgeoning is demonstrated by recent collections of essays, *Iris Murdoch and Moral Imaginations* (Roberts and Baumann), *Iris Murdoch and Her Work: Critical Essays* (Kirca and Okuroglu), and *Iris Murdoch and Morality* (Rowe and Horner), and by monographs such as Leeson's *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist* and Zuba's *Iris Murdoch's Contemporary Retrieval of Plato: The Influence of an Ancient Philosopher on a Modern Novelist*.

But what is even more significant is that Murdoch's influence appears increasingly ubiquitous. A survey of the current scene reveals her marks/traces, not only in works on literature and philosophy where they are to be expected, but also in astonishingly diverse locations. In literary theory and criticism, Murdoch appears in wide-ranging

texts, *The Post-War British Literature Handbook* (Cockin and Morrison), DiBattista's *Novel Characters: A Genealogy* and James's *The Legacies of Modernism* as well as in specific works; Jordan's *Chance and the Modern British Novel: From Henry Green to Iris Murdoch*, Turner's *Post-War British Women Novelists and the Canon*, Dooley's *Courage and Truthfulness: Ethical Strategies and the Creative Process in the Novels of Iris Murdoch, Doris Lessing and V.S. Naipaul*, Ikonomakis's *Post-War British Fiction as 'Metaphysical Ethography': God, Godgames and Goodness in John Fowles' The Magus and Iris Murdoch's The Sea, The Sea*, and Rostek's *Sealing Through the Past*. Likewise in philosophy Murdoch's influence emerges in reference works, *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature* (Hagberg and Jost), in thematic texts, Leask and Cassidy's *The Taylor Effect*, Evans's *The Image in Mind*, Lobel's *The Quest for God and the Good* and Jollimore's *Love's Vision*, and in studies of individual philosophers; Puchner's *The Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocations in Theater and Philosophy*, Stokes's *Kierkegaard's Mirrors*, Day's *Seeing Wittgenstein Anew* and Bax's *Subjectivity After Wittgenstein*. Murdoch is furthermore present in a work combining phenomenology with ecology, James's *The Presence of Nature: A Study in Phenomenology and Environmental Philosophy*. She is still denoted 'Sartre's profoundest critic in English' in Thompson's *Understand Existentialism*, and her influence on ethics is seen in basic textbooks, Kuusela's *Key Terms in Ethics*, and in specialized studies such as *Discourses and Practices of Terrorism* (Brecher, Devenney and Winter), *Communities of Peace: Confronting Injustice and Creating Justice* (Poe) and Stonebridge's *The Judicial Imagination: Writing After Nuremberg*. She is also present in the disciplines of psychology, Brinkmann's *Psychology as a Moral Science: Perspectives on Normativity* and Alford's *Psychology and the Natural Law of Reparation*, and of theology, both Western — *Literature and Theology* (Walton), Schweiker's *Dust that Breathes: Christian Faith and the New Humanisms*, Grey's *Advent of Peace*, Crosby's *Faith and Reason* — and Eastern, Angle's *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy*. Murdoch is included in feminist perspectives, *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Anderson), and is important in works on mysticism, Izzo's *The Influence of Mysticism on Twentieth Century British and American Literature* and Yore's *The Mystic Way in Postmodernity*. Murdoch proves significant in books about aspiration toward human excellence, Freeman's *Hindsight: The Promise and Peril of Looking Backward* and Crawford's *The Case for Working with Your Hands*. She features in studies of other writers, Stannard's *Muriel Spark* and Zaretsky's *Albert Camus, Elements of a Life*; in Gothic studies, *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (Wallace and Smith), and in contemporary cultural studies, Turner's *Rejoice, Rejoice!: Britain in the 1980s*. As well as in these Anglo-American texts, Murdoch is cited in recent French scholarship, Laugier's *La voix et la vertu*, and appears in new German biographical studies, van Loyen's *Franz Bauermann Steiner*.

Personal favourites from this wealth of fresh Murdoch scholarship are Martin and Rowe's exemplary *Iris Murdoch: A Literary Life*, a richly insightful introduction to Murdoch's life and work, and Laing's idiosyncratic geo-literary reverie, *To the River: A Journey Beneath the Surface* which reflects on water and marriage in Murdoch and Virginia Woolf.

Traces of the way that the culture and literature of Japan made its mark on Murdoch's work are clearly evident<sup>5</sup>, and, reciprocally, her imprint is found in Japanese readership and scholarship, both in the Japanese Iris Murdoch Society and in reading groups<sup>6</sup>. To celebrate their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008, The Iris Murdoch Society of Japan published *Iris Murdoch wo Yomu: Zen Sakuhin Gaido*, a short introduction in Japanese to all Murdoch's works including her poems, with the aim of attracting new Japanese readers to Murdoch<sup>7</sup>. Murdoch scholars from East and West alike thus continue to make their mark on the world through research and through passing their passion for Murdoch's work on to the next generation. The global link Murdoch scholarship thus creates between cultures is valuable and the presence of Japanese Murdoch scholars at the Iris Murdoch conferences is warmly welcomed. We hope to see new as well as old Murdoch friends from Japan at the 6<sup>th</sup> Iris Murdoch conference in Kingston University in September 2012, where we will share the rewarding process of tracing the marks Murdoch has left on our world, to the enrichment of us all.

## Notes

1. Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p.170.
2. All scholars are welcome to visit the Iris Murdoch Special Collections in the Kingston University Archives. Full catalogue details can be found at <http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/research/iris-murdoch/collections/> Visits should be arranged in advance with the Archivist, Katie Giles, [archives@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:archives@kingston.ac.uk)
3. Raymond Queneau, (1903-1976): Hal Lidderdale (1911-1992): John Gheeraert (1939-2003): Harry Weinberger, (1924-2009).
4. To be published by Chatto & Windus in 2014.
5. See Chiho Omichi, 'Netsuke in Iris Murdoch's Novels', *The Iris Murdoch Review* 2 (2010), 25-34.
6. Email to the author from Professor Miharu Otsuki 17-9-11 reports that Iris Murdoch was discussed at the NEAL Conference in August 2011 and that a reading group in the Kyoto area enjoyed *The Sea, The Sea*.
7. I am indebted to Chiho Omichi for this information.

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